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LANL Scientist Testifies at Hearing About Research Park at LANL, Importance of Collaboration Between Research Parks

Washington, DC – Today, the Energy and Environment Subcommittee of the Committee on Science and Technology held a hearing on environmental research at the Department of Energy. The hearing examined climate and environmental research programs conducted by the Department of Energy as well as Rep. Ben Ray Luján's National Environmental Research Park (NERP) bill. Dr. Nate McDowell of Los Alamos National Laboratory gave testimony at the hearing. Rep. Luján is a member of the Committee on Science and Technology.

"I'm glad that we conducted a hearing to discuss environmental research by the Department of Energy along with the National Energy Research Park legislation I introduced last week," said Rep. Luján. "The witnesses provided excellent testimony that will help shape future efforts to address issues from climate change to contamination."

Dr. Nate McDowell of Los Alamos National Laboratory talked about the advanced laser facility at the Los Alamos NERP which uses laser technology to observe and monitor carbon dioxide emissions. He discussed the importance of coordination between the NERPs and collaboration on their respective research projects. He also talked about how NERPs are not consistently funded and often do not have the necessary resources to utilize their full environmental research potential.

Other witnesses included Dr. Dave Bader, Director, Program for Climate Model Diagnosis and Intercomparison; Dr. Paul Hanson, Group Leader, Ecosystem and Plant Sciences, Environmental Sciences Division, Oak Ridge National Laboratory; and Dr. J. Whitfield Gibbons, Professor of Ecology at the University of Georgia and a Senior Research Ecologist at the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory.

Dr. Hanson discussed how the NERPs are comprised of preserved land in its natural state which provides a research environment necessary to understanding the environmental impacts of humans and industrial development. Dr. Bader discussed climate modeling and simulation. Dr. Gibbons elaborated on the habitat reconstruction research performed at the Savannah River NERP and how they use the NERP to study and create new energy technologies.

Last week, Rep. Luján introduced legislation that will promote environmental science programs at Los Alamos National Laboratory by authorizing funding for its NERP as well as for six other NERPs throughout the country.

The research conducted at the NERPs produces valuable data that can be used to fight climate change and clean up contaminated sites. The NERPs have existed for decades and have enormous potential for studying the impact of climate change on the environment. With the new authorization and consistent funding, they can expand their research activities. Rep. Luján's legislation authorizes $5,000,000 for each NERP for each of the fiscal years 2010 through 2014. The legislation has been referred to the Committee on Science and Technology.

"These parks are unique outdoor laboratories that offer secure settings for long-term research on a broad range of subjects, including wildlife biology, ecology, climate change effects, and maintenance of freshwater ecosystems," Rep. Luján said when the legislation was introduced last week. "The parks also provide rich environments for training future researchers and introducing the public to environmental sciences."

For more information about the Department of Energy's National Energy Research Parks, visit http://www.nerp.rnl.gov/
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For more information about the Los Alamos National Environmental Research Park, visit http://www.lanl.gov/orgs/tt/partnering/user_facility/facilities/environ_research.shtml
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